

the hope dwelt with her till years after, when it was fulfilled.

Helen thought her husband depressed when he returned that night, and wondered whether he had received but scant courtesy from his publishers. She asked him a trifle timidly, as they sat together in the dusky drawing-room after dinner, how he had fared. Their demeanour towards each other was still much strained—his surpassingly gentle; hers marked by a peculiar hesitating stillness. Sophia Ryder had expressed it well when she said they seemed to be feeling every step of the way.

"Oh, it's all right. Davenant was very civil. I daresay he'll publish the thing, as he did before, without expressing any opinion. It's not that that troubles me, but my own conviction of its poverty. I wish you'd tell me truly what you think."

It was absolutely the first time he had asked her to pass an opinion on his work, and his words had still the power to thrill her—ay, to the very heart. And she could not help contrasting this humility, which oppresses every honest soul in the contemplation of all finished work whatsoever, with his former complacency, his absolute confidence in the perfection of his labour.

"I do not know very much, but I think you have never written anything to equal it."

"Do you think so?" he asked quickly, and the light leaped in his eyes. "Tell me how?"

"It is sincere, and it comes from the heart," she answered simply.

"God knows it was wrung from the heart—the outcome of desperation, Helen. Do you know what was my moving impulse all through?"

She shook her head.

"To write something which I might lay at your feet as an atonement. Heavens! the fool I have been all through. God forgive me! I do not deserve even this semblance of peace."